

Bethlehem Baptist Church (Tract #12664)  
1 mile west of Route AA, 3.4 miles south of  
its intersection with Route 35  
Clinton Vicinity  
Henry County  
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1227

HABS,  
MO,  
42-CLINT.V,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. MO-1227

## BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH (Tract #12664)

Location: 1 mile west of Route AA, 3.4 miles south of intersection with Route 35, approximately 4 miles southwest of Clinton, Clinton Vicinity, Henry County, Missouri.

USGS Gaines Quadrangle, UTM Coordinates 15.436570.4241360

Present Owner: Trustees of Bethlehem Baptist Church

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: One of the first churches organized in the survey area, the Bethlehem Baptist Church represented an important aspect of community life. This building, the congregation's second, was built in 1882, reflecting growth in the area as well as in the church. In the cemetery are buried many of Henry County's earliest pioneers.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1882; building dedicated December 31, 1882 (Henry County Democrat, January 4, 1883).
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: NE 1/4 NW 1/4 Section 30 Township 41 N Range 25 W. Land entered by William Hibler December 20, 1853. Sold to Absolom Vickers December 5, 1854. There are three deeds of condition granted by Vickers to the Trustees of Bethlehem Baptist Church, totaling 10.09 acres. The first, January 4, 1857 (H:367) was made after the death of his young daughter, and she was the first to be buried in the cemetery (Smith). Two others were made February 2, 1871 (3:501, 520).
4. Builder or contractor, suppliers: As with the subsequent work on alterations, it may be assumed that members of the Church donated their work and, in some cases, building materials (Programme, Pogue).

5. Original plan: The church is rectangular in plan on an east-west axis. There are four window bays on the north and south walls. Originally, there were two entrances at the east which opened on two aisles across which ran nine rows of pews. At the west end, under a central window, the pulpit stood on a raised platform which was flanked by five rows of pews to the north and south to form a sort of choir. The church was heated by a stove placed in the center of the room (Collins).
6. Alterations and additions: In 1923, the First Baptist Church in Clinton donated a stained glass window which was installed in the west end (Programme). In 1950, electricity was installed in the church: six lights, three on each side, and two exterior lights (Minutes 8:25). In 1955, the two doors on the east end were replaced by a central double door entry. In the old days, women had entered by the north door and sat on the north side of the church, with the men using the south door and sitting in the south side. The young people sat in the middle. The narrow doors were inconvenient for funerals and had to be changed. Local funeral homes were the major contributors to the building fund (Minutes 8:57, Pogue, Smith, Boyd). In 1961, two square rooms were incorporated into the the east end of the church, flanking the central door. These were used for Sunday School classes (Minutes, 9:52, 55-57 Pogue). The ceiling was lowered circa 1968 (Minutes 9:137).

B. Historical events and persons:

Bethlehem Baptist Church was organized in the home of James Lee, September 6, 1854. Peter Brown and W.C. Wright walked the thirty-two miles from Osceola to conduct services. The first meeting house was built in 1856 on land later donated by Absolom Vickers. The frame building, constructed of rough-hewn logs cut by broadaxes, had interior walls lined with white muslin which was applied with a starch paste made from flour and water (Smith). Meetings were suspended during the war, 1863-1864. By 1880, the congregation had outgrown the original church building, which was sold to Absolom Vickers who moved it back to his farm and used it for a barn. The present edifice was dedicated December 31, 1882.

When the Corps of Engineers began to condemn many of the surrounding farms, the church lost a large part of its congregation. The officers resigned October 31, 1971, but meetings were held every fifth Sunday until May, 1976. The stained glass window, handmade pews and pulpit have been removed and installed in the Henry County Museum. The building is now an empty shell and prey to vandalism, as is the cemetery, where many of the county's early pioneers are buried (Lee, James, Vickers, French). Since the Corps did not buy the building, but only the land up to its foundation, it is still owned by the Trustees of Bethlehem Baptist Church who have as yet made no plans for its future.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Postcard, ca. 1910, showing church before alteration of facade. Photocopied for HABS records. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Huey.

Oil painting by Ike Parker in the Henry County Museum showing the church after the renovation of the facade.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources: Plat Book A and Deed books F:382, H:367, 3:501, 520 in the Registry of Deeds, Henry County Courthouse, Clinton.

Minutes of Bethlehem Baptist Church, volume 4 (January 15, 1882) through 10 (May 30, 1976). They are in the care of Mr. Boyd.

Collins, A. Lloyd. Scrapbook of Missouri Baptist History. 1939. ms 1394, Western Manuscript Division, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia.

- b. Interviews: Mr. John Lee Boyd, RFD 3, Clinton, July 31, 1977. An active member of the church for many years. Has the church minutes.

Mr. and Mrs. Buford Huey, RFD 3, Clinton, August 23, 1977. Former trustees of the church.

Mr. George Pogue, Brownington, July 29, 1977. An active member of the church for several years.

Mrs. Elisabeth Smith, 217 South Water, Clinton, July 29, 1977. Great-granddaughter of Dr. Jennings, preacher at the church in the 1860s and 1870s.

D. Secondary sources:

1. Bethlehem Baptist Church. Programme. Centennial Celebration. September 5, 1954. A copy of this pamphlet is in the Henry County Museum.
2. "Dedication of the Bethlehem Baptist Church House". Henry County Democrat. January 4, 1883.
3. Driggs, James D. History of the Tebo Baptist Association. Deepwater, 1928.
4. History of Henry and Saint Clair Counties. St. Joseph, 1883. Pp. 487-488.
5. Miles, Kathleen White. Tattle-tales. Clinton, 1967. p. 17.

Prepared by: Paul Garfield Weed  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
Summer 1977

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Housing one of the oldest organized rural churches in Henry County, this one-room building was built in the 1880s and is a good example of its type.
2. Condition: The church has been vacant for several years and has been heavily vandalized.

B. Condition of exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This one-story rectangular building is 28'2 1/2" across its one-bay front, and 46'3" long.
2. Foundations: The sandstone foundation is about 12" high set on grade.
3. Wall construction: White horizontal wood siding on balloon frame.
4. Structural system: Balloon framing. The roofing members span the interior with no intermediate supports.
5. Porches: Four steps lead up to the concrete porch across the front.
6. Chimney: One centrally located brick stove chimney.
7. Openings: The church formerly had two doors on the east (front) elevation. These doors were removed and replaced by a double door, which has hollow core doors with small rectangular glass panes. A single narrow vertical louver with a peaked lintel is set in the east wall over the door. On the north and south facades are four tall vertical windows with double hung sashes and four-over-four lights. The lintels have cyma recta moldings.
8. Roof: The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles over wood shingles.

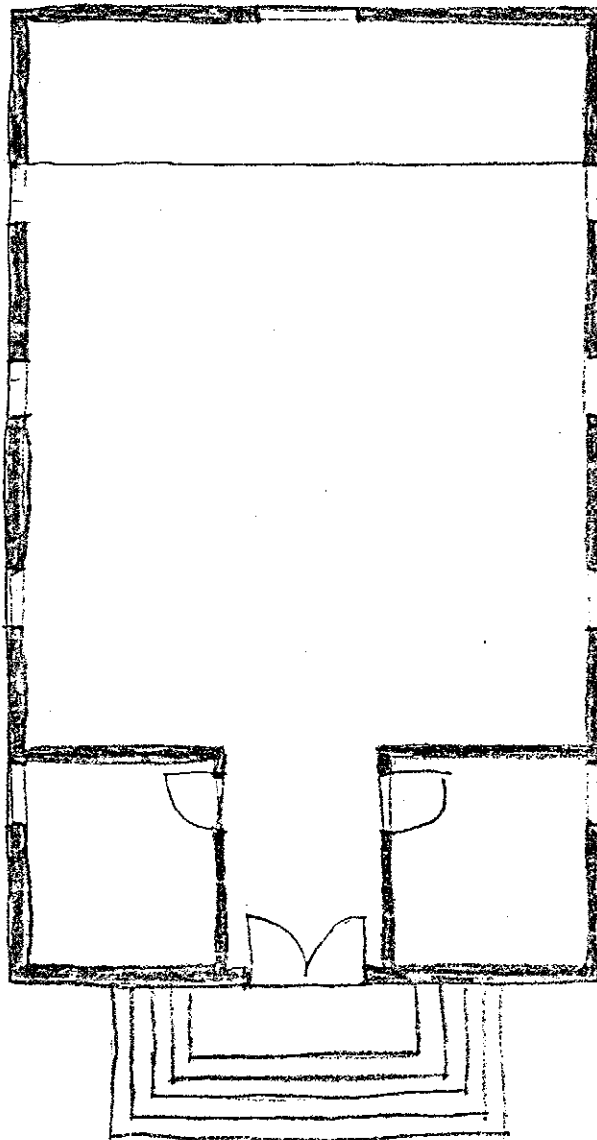
C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The double doors at the center of the east end lead past two small square rooms, one in each corner. The sanctuary is one large rectangular space with a raised platform at the west end. A stove sat in the middle of this space with a flue leading up to the chimney. A large stained glass window at the rear behind the raised platform has been removed.
2. Flooring: There is 2 1/4" wide tongue and groove wood flooring. A 4' wide carpet strip runs down the center of the room to the platform.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls have wallpaper over plaster on wood lath. The ceiling is covered with large sheets of accoustical board.
4. Trim: A chair rail connects the window sills and runs around the sides and west end of the room.

D. Site:

The church, which faces east, has large cedar trees at the front corners and shrubs along the south wall. A private drive approaches the church from the east and passes on the south side toward the large cemetery on the north which is enclosed by a fence.

Prepared by: William Brookover  
Project Supervisor  
Historic American Building  
Survey  
Summer 1977



PLAN BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH  
#12664

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Truman Reservoir Project was funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kansas City District, in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the construction of the Harry S. Truman Dam and Reservoir, in the summer of 1977. Willam Brookover (Columbia University), supervisor; Michael Connor (University of Virginia), team foreman; Gary Baker (Catholic University), Edwin Daniel (Mississippi State), and Gary Statkus (University of Illinois), student architects; Paul Weed (Columbia University), architectural historian.